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SUBJECT: ARMENIA: MEDIA REACTION TO PRESS CONFERENCE ON  
DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

#### SUMMARY

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1. SUMMARY: On October 27, Ambassador Evans and USAID Mission Director Robin Phillips held a press conference on U.S. democracy assistance programs. The press conference focused on planned U.S. assistance to help Armenia hold free and fair parliamentary elections in 2007 and presidential elections in 2008. The purpose of the conference was to begin to focus attention on the importance of the 2007/2008 elections, as well as to explain our assistance programs to the media amid recent speculation in the press that U.S. assistance is either funding a revolution or supporting the opposition. The media extensively covered the event, with many outlets focusing on the Ambassador's comments that "the U.S. does not favor revolutions in the streets." Much of the opposition media criticized these statements, while pro-government outlets tended to quote these statements without editorial comments of their own. One newspaper continued its vendetta against the Ambassador. END SUMMARY.

#### OPPOSITION MEDIA CRITICIZE STATEMENTS AGAINST REVOLUTION

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2. During the press conference, Ambassador Evans stated, "The United States does not favor revolutions in the streets. Revolution is the product of failure. We favor evolution. We believe that the way to choose leaders is at the ballot box, not in the streets." Pro-opposition press responded largely negatively to these statements.

3. IRVUNK, an oppositionist newspaper, quoted Ambassador Evans's statement against revolutions and commented, "This textbook truth was presented by the ambassador of a country that is carrying out color revolutions throughout the world. With this, the Ambassador contradicted the position expressed so far by the leaders of his country."

4. "168 HOURS," also an oppositionist newspaper, stated, "The most interesting statement by John Evans was that the U.S. does not support street revolutions. The comments are needless..." The article continues, "Of course, the press conference was interpreted differently by different media outlets. The pro-government media mentioned with open satisfaction that the U.S. does not support the plans of the opposition; the opposition media were very disappointed and dissatisfied; others simply presented the ideas expressed during the press conference without any comments."

#### PRO-GOVERNMENT MEDIA REPORTS ON THE AMBASSADOR'S STATEMENTS AGAINST REVOLUTION

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5. HAYOTS ASHKHAR, a pro-government newspaper, published an article entitled, "The U.S. Does Not Support Street Revolutions." The article states, "When asked whether he thinks it is possible that the referendum will lead to a revolution, the Ambassador gave a comprehensive answer, 'The United States does not support street revolutions.'"

6. NOVOYE VREMYA, a Russian-language pro-government newspaper, reported, "The head of the U.S. diplomatic mission stated that the U.S. supports evolutionary development in Armenia. This wish of the U.S. diplomat was accepted by the local oppositionists without enthusiasm. Some of them directly hinted that Evans's words are not an order, that the referendum is doomed to fail, and that people will take to the streets on the evening of November

27. 'What can such statements from a State Department representative mean on the eve of our constitutional referendum?' asked the opposition mass media, who at the same time accused the American diplomat of being pro-government."

#### GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND POLITICIANS RESPOND TO THE CONFERENCE

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7. The media reported on the response of government

officials and politicians to the press conference. Al+, an independent news agency, reported, "Yesterday, U.S. Ambassador to Armenia John Evans held a press conference in which he presented U.S. government programs supporting the 2007-2008 elections. Today this step of the Ambassador was commented on by various members of parliament with differing points of view--as an attempt to meddle in the internal affairs of Armenia, and as a way to speed up the democratization process." The article states that deputies from the opposition Justice bloc consider the U.S. program "both a contribution to the development of democracy and interference in the internal affairs of the country."

18. NOVOYE VREMYA also reported on the response of politicians and officials to the press conference. An article in the newspaper states, "The reaction of local politicians to the State Department initiative varied. For example, the leader of the United Labor Party, Guren Arsenian, reacted to the proposed package without additional emotion and noted, 'It's our fault that this kind of package came into existence. Our elections were not only far from international standards, but also gave grounds for mistrust among our society and all the branches of power.'" The article continues, "The Deputy Parliament Speaker, Vahan Hovhannisian, does not share the optimism of some of his colleagues. Hovhannisian considers it normal that a young democratic country is given advice by an experienced country, but wonders if the U.S. 'is once again following double standards.' Hovhannisian is concerned that the U.S. has kept silent about the 'shameful things that happen in Azerbaijan in regard to the lack of freedom of speech and human rights issues.' Hovhannisian complained, 'When we close the streets to demonstrators, the West immediately submits a package of suggestions and recommendations to us. So, I am forced to believe that the actions of the State Department are determined by oil interests.'"

"HAYKAKAN ZHAMANAK" CONTINUES CAMPAIGN AGAINST AMBASSADOR EVANS

19. HAYKAKAN ZHAMANAK, a radical oppositionist daily, continued to publish personal attacks against Ambassador Evans. An article entitled "Just Like Himself," states, "When asked how the fact that one of the opposition parties was not provided an area for its party congress fits into the context of democracy, Evans answered that single cases should not be extrapolated upon. We should hope that Evans is also a single case and not an example of all Americans."

10. A second article entitled "Is There Life On Mars? The U.S. Ambassador Likes Pilaf," states, "During the question and answer session, the Ambassador tried to distract journalists, talking of journalist training programs proposed in the project, and asked journalists to keep their questions short if he promised to keep his answers short in turn." The article continues, "This continued to the point when Evans's patience was exhausted and he announced that he needed to go to lunch. This was the end of the press conference even though journalists still had questions to ask." (Note: Journalists in Yerevan tend to ask lengthy questions that amount to political diatribes. Before ending the press conference, the Ambassador invited journalists who had additional questions to submit them to the Public Affairs Section. End Note.) (Comment: The Embassy has made several attempts to improve relations with this newspaper. It appears, however, that the editor-in-chief has chosen to pursue a personal campaign against the Ambassador. End Comment.)

EVANS